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ABSTRACT

Many sites in the south central states recall the procession of people who came across the continent with the passing frontier. This paper elaborates on several historic sites in the south central United States. The purpose of the paper is to introduce a series of places to the students and teachers of U.S. history. The paper recommends that interested students pursue a study of the important people and significant events associated with a site. It suggests using the Internet for maps, pictures, photos, and general information. The paper provides a short description of the heritage of select sites in Arkansas, Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas. (Contains 13 suggestions for further reading.) (BT)

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HISTORIC AMERICA: THE SOUTH CENTRAL STATES

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HISTORIC AMERICA: THE SOUTH CENTRAL STATES

Boot Hill in Dodge City and Inscription Rock in New Mexico are but two manifestations of the westward movement in the south central states. Still other examples exist, sites that recall the procession of people who came across the continent with the passing frontier. Towns, fortresses, and old ports bring to mind the lives of Bat Masterson, Billy the Kid, and Judge Roy Bean. But other lifestyles thrived here, too. In Louisiana, French and Hispanic influences resulted in a mix of architectural styles that can be seen in the homes in New Orleans' Vieux Carre'. In other places sod houses and log cabins have been preserved, tributes to those who homesteaded the plains. Elsewhere Indian pueblos are testament to the ways of life that prospered hundreds of years before the arrival of Europeans. Like other parts of the country, the south central states have also had their presidents, military men, literary figures, and folk heroes. President Truman was a product of the region. And Andrew Jackson rose to fame here when he fought the British in the last battle of the War of 1812 at Chalmette, Louisiana. Present also are the homes of Mark Twain and Daniel Boone. Offered below are a few of these sites (America's Historic Places 1988; Smithsonian Guides 1998; Exploring America's Historic Places 1997). A short description of some aspect of their western heritage is included. The purpose is to introduce a series of places to the students and teachers of American history. Interested students can pursue a study of the important people and

significant events associated with a site in some other manner. The Internet is useful for maps, pictures, photographs, and general information.

ARKANSAS

For centuries, Indians had come to what is now Eureka Springs to seek the medicinal effects of the dozens of springs that come from the local rock formations. But it was a physician who, when their rejuvenating powers healed his son's eye affliction, brought the site to the attention of the public. In 1879 the doctor urged an ailing friend to bathe in the springs; he was healed, word of his cure spread, and the rush was on. By the 1880s several trains a day stopped at Eureka Springs; by 1900 a population of twenty thousand depended on the bottled-water industry.

In the early 1800s, Cherokee Indians, removed from their eastern reservations by the government, entered Osage Indian territory in Arkansas. In order to maintain peace between the warring factions and to protect Indian land from white settlement, Fort Smith was built on the cliffs of the Arkansas River in 1817. Its men performed their duties with little incident until another fort was built farther to the west in 1824 and the first fort was closed. But Indians continued to come into Arkansas, as did settlers. In response to the settlers' requests for safe passage, another Fort Smith was built not far from the first one in 1838. By 1871 this outpost, too, had passed its zenith and once again it was closed. Within the year its buildings became the Federal Court for Western Arkansas. In 1875 Judge Isaac Parker set up his office in the fort's old storeroom, his courthouse in the barracks, and his jail in the barracks' basement. Soon the jail was dubbed by locals as Hell on the Border, and Parker as the Hanging Judge. In actuality, he was a tough but

fair jurist, whom the law-abiding whites and Indians trusted as a friend. Parker continued to hold court here until his death in 1896. The site includes the gallows where seventy-nine of the most lawless convicted by Parker met their ends.

After the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, Thomas Jefferson sent an expedition to investigate stories of miracle waters coming from a valley in the Zig Zag Mountains. Their exuberant return led to an influx of settlers, and by the 1830s the virtues of the place were so widely heralded that the government set aside some of the land for the long-term use of the American people. The spa as a consequence became a presage for the national park system. Though Indians had long referred to the area as the Valley of the Vapors, not until 1840 was the first bathhouse opened. In 1883 Hot Springs Creek was diverted underground, and its mineral waters piped to individual baths. City blocks were laid out and Bathhouse Row in Hot Springs began to emerge.

COLORADO

John Gregory, a never-do-well prospector, was the first to find gold on the slopes of what is now Gregory Gulch. When news of his find, in the spring of 1859, made it to Denver a week later, hundreds of prospectors rushed to lay claims of their own; by the end of summer the population had grown to five thousand. In 1864 one of the mining camps was incorporated as Central City. Before long it became important enough that for a while it competed with Denver for selection as the territorial capital. Bars, bawdy houses, dance halls, and burlesque theaters fronted its main street, along with stores, churches, homes, a courthouse, and a school. In 1872 the Teller House hotel was built. When President Ulysses S. Grant came for a stay in 1873, its walkway was laid in silver

ingots in his honor. But just as the city was taking on the airs of urban comfort, its mines were running out of gold, and by 1880 decline had set in.

In November 1806, when Zebulon Pike first sighted the mountain that now bears his name, it seemed to him like a faint blue cloud. Searching for the sources of the Arkansas and Red rivers, he and his men had just crossed the plains and sighted the first of the peaks of the Continental Divide. Pike and three others set out for the top, but because they were inadequately clothed, ran into snow, and had too little food, they stopped short of the summit. Pike later wrote that no one could have made it to the top. In actuality, the first explorer to climb the 14,110-foot peak was a botanist with an expedition, who climbed the summit in 1820. For miners in the rush of 1859, the area around Pikes Peak was a land of plenty, and the slogan "Pikes Peak or Bust!" was seen on thousands of prairie wagons. It was some time before the surroundings themselves gave up any ore, but in time the area became one of the West's richest producers of precious metals. For Katherine L. Bates, who made it to the top in 1893, the panorama was inspiration for her music, America the Beautiful. And others still come to journey to the top and marvel at the spectacular scenery.

One of America's oldest railroads is the narrow-gauge Durango-to-Silverton branch of the Denver and Rio Grande. Built to take miners to the San Juan Mountains, the railroad was part of a 675-mile network that once serviced southwestern Colorado. Narrow-gauge railroads such as the Durango-Silverton, just three feet wide instead of the usual 4 feet 8 1/2 inches, were less expensive to build in rugged terrain and could take to sharper turns. The line was completed in 1882 despite a harsh winter and despite the rigors of building the High Line segment through the Animas Canyon. Here, high above

the Animas River, a roadbed was laid into the canyon wall in an effort thought to be one of the greatest in railroad history.

KANSAS

In the spring of 1860, as a rider and horse left from a station in St. Joseph, Missouri, on the first half of a journey that would end in Sacramento, California, the Pony Express was born. In a promise to deliver letters to the far West in no more than ten days, half the time required by the usual stagecoach route, the Pony Express followed the Oregon-California Trail across the central and western states. Important to the operation were the stations along the way, such as the one owned by Gerat Hollenberg, where riders changed horses and rode off again. The stations were put at fifteen-mile intervals along most of the 2,000-mile route, and at every second or third station the rider would turn over his twenty-pound saddlebag to the next carrier. Traveling in good and bad weather on horses bred for speed, the riders were hired for their agility and lean, light physiques. Though the Pony Express met its goal of speedy delivery, expenses for all practical purposes bankrupted the business. And the completion of a coast to coast telegraph line brought a cheaper, even faster way to communicate. Within just a year and a half of its inaugural run, the Pony Express was out of business. After the company's closing, Hollenberg went on to run his station as a stagecoach stop and also managed to set up the town of Hanover and serve in the territorial legislature.

In 1825 the United States government finalized a treaty with the Osage Indians permitting travelers to take the Santa Fe Trail across their homelands. Lying at the edge of the plains, Council Grove soon became an important stopover for settlers on their way

west. A spring was nearby, there was plenty of forage for livestock, and the dense forests were a source of wood for wagon wheels and axles. The town's further development as a settlement dates from 1846, when a second agreement put the Kaw Indians on a reservation that included Council Grove. Before long merchants moved into the town, including Seth Hays, a descendant of Daniel Boone, cousin of Kit Carson, and Council Grove's first homesteader. The Kaw Mission, a boarding school for Indians, opened in 1850. Other sites include the 1857 Last Chance Store where travelers could buy food and other supplies, and the jail, built in the 1860s.

Dodge City, incorporated in 1872, owed its early expansion to the buffalo. Sharpshooters could make a hundred dollars a day in their quest for the buffalo's hides, bones, and meat. And businessmen like Charles Rath grew prosperous and powerful supplying hunters and preparing hides. The government encouraged buffalo hunting for other reasons. As General Philip Sheridan remarked in 1875, the buffalo were the Indians' "commissary": take away their means of support and peace would prevail. Within a decade the herds were all but gone, and longhorns from Texas replaced them as Dodge City's principal source of income. Boot Hill recalls the lawlessness of those times in the 1870s. And Front Street offers a variety of stores, businesses, and a full compliment of saloons, including the Long Branch. It also brings back to life the time when the likes of Wyatt Earp and Bat Masterson brought a shred of decency to the place once called the "wickedest little city in America."

LOUISIANA

In 1820 John James Audubon took his rifle, his watercolors, and a young assistant, and made his way down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers, leaving his family and friends in Cincinnati. Having failed in business, he turned to art. On the way he was introduced to the wife of a well-to-do land owner who employed him to tutor her daughter for sixty dollars a month plus room and board at the Oakley House not far from what is now St. Francisville. For part of his day he would be free to roam the area and to paint. Audubon and his thirteen-year-old assistant, whose job was to add background to the painter's sketches of birds, had a studio on the upper floor of the manor and access to one of the richest areas for studying wildlife in the nation. In 120 days in the marshes, woods, and uplands of Oakley House, Audubon finished thirty-two of the paintings that later appeared in Birds of America.

With his children growing in number and his income from the sugar trade burgeoning, David Weeks needed a larger home in 1831. He chose a site on the Bayou Teche not far from what is now New Iberia and hired James Bedell to build a plantation house. The outcome is the Shadows-on-the-Teche, a three-storied structure of pink brick with a colonnaded front painted an off-white. In the Creole way, there are no halls. Instead, each of the lower floor's rooms opens onto a porch, from one end of which an exterior stairway spirals to an identical porch on the second floor. Weeks never had the opportunity to live in his new home; he died in 1834, just days after its completion. His wife devoted the last of her years to decorating the interior with the best furniture that Louisiana merchants could provide and to landscaping the estate. In 1863 she died in a second floor bedroom, while Union soldiers quartered below.

Three years after French authorities in Louisiana settled on this site as their new capital in 1718, the streets of the Vieux Carre' in old New Orleans were laid out. Engineers planned for a city of some sixty-six square blocks, with an open-air pavilion, now Jackson Square, as the focal point. Though the French were forced to give New Orleans to the Spanish in 1763, little changed in the way of the city. Then it came under United States control in 1803, and after the War of 1812, it became an important stopover for steamboats on the Mississippi River. It also gained notoriety as one of the most diverse cities in America, where Dixieland jazz and the nightlife were particularly important.

MISSOURI

Journeying west on the Missouri River in 1804, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark were excited by the future site of Arrow Rock. Clark later described it as a promising place for a settlement. Before long a ferry business was started here and a steady stream of settlers was traveling through. Arrow Rock thrived as a river port, reaching its peak in the 1860s. But passed over by the railroads and the construction of a bridge and nearly destroyed by fire, the town went into a decline. Among the sites of interest are the 1834 Old Tavern and the 1839 courthouse. Also interesting is the 1837 home of George Caleb Bingham, the American painter of western life. A self-educated artist who began as a portrait painter, Bingham achieved fame for his realistic renderings of scenes from everyday life.

As rivers gave way to overland routes during the 1800s, St. Louis was losing ground to Chicago as the principal link between eastern and western trade. To restore the

city's glory, a bridge was needed across the Mississippi River. In 1867, James Buchanan Eads was named the chief engineer for the project. A self-educated construction worker, Eads had little experience in the building of bridges, and his plan caused a concern. Sitting on bedrock far beneath the river bottom, the two-tiered bridge was to accommodate both a railroad and a roadway. Three huge arches would be placed on concrete supports to handle loads far in excess of any that had been attempted to that date. And they would extend from one bank to the other across fifteen hundred feet of water, a record-breaking distance for such a structure. But Eads's greatest achievement was his use of steel, a new metal that had never before been used in a project of this magnitude. There were many difficulties that had to be overcome during the seven years of construction, including the aberrations of the river, money problems, the need for new technologies, and bouts of the bends. With calm and attention to detail, Eads anticipated each problem, inventing ways to proceed as needs arose. With the combined waters of the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, the Great Lakes, and the Mississippi River, the bridge was dedicated in an opening ceremony on July 4, 1874. To show the genius of his design, Eads sent fourteen locomotives or seven hundred tons across the bridge. It held then, and it holds now, a tribute to its builder.

Established in 1735, Ste. Genevieve was founded by French Canadians who had earlier started a settlement on the east bank of the Mississippi River. The site at first was located on land by the river but, due to flooding, was moved to higher ground in the 1780s. The origins of the settlement's economic well-being were varied: it was a point of concentration for farming, fur trading, and salt production on the Saline Creek and also served as a center and shipping destination for lead mines farther west. From a total of

twenty-seven inhabitants in 1752, its population had grown to 1,200 by 1796. The houses still standing from this period are now Ste. Genevieve's main attraction. One of these, the Bolduc House, was built in 1770 by a wealthy businessman from Quebec. Its angular roof recalls a Canadian style of architecture, as does its construction. Instead of being placed horizontally, the heavy oaks that constitute its walls are set vertically on a stone foundation and the cracks between them are filled with a clay mixture. The covered porches on all sides of the house are a Creole feature, meant for protection from the rain and sun.

NEW MEXICO

In the far reaches of Chaco Canyon are the ruins of stone structures, a reminder of the Anasazi Indians who centuries ago lived here. The largest of their buildings in the narrow valley, dwellings up to several stories high, some with hundreds of rooms, were built in the eleventh century, the peak of their civilization. The Indian villages at Chaco Canyon were carefully planned and built using adobe techniques and materials. The Anasazi in all probability came here because the canyon's water-carved gullies provided enough water when in flood; they were especially skilled at containing and routing the water. Their sudden disappearance around twelve hundred is harder to explain. Was it caused by a change in the climate? Or did other circumstances play a role? A look at the site poses all kinds of perplexities. Does the mathematical precision of Casa Rinconada suggest a knowledge of the stars? Do the larger homes and luxury items taken from Pueblo Bonito indicate an upper class? Does Chetro Ketl's colonnaded walkway suggest

a Mexican influence? These structures and others bring to mind some of the mysteries still to be solved.

On a bluff in the desert east of Ramah are signs of settlement that long predate the earliest European arrivals in colonial America. They were etched into the sandstone of Inscription Rock, a towering cliff on El Morro mesa. Most of the names can be seen on a side of the rock nearest to a pool kept full by rain and melting snow; for hundreds of years its springs made El Morro a haven for people crossing the desert here. The oldest signs are petroglyphs, or word pictures, left by Indians who came to the mesa long ago. The earliest known imprint by a Spaniard was made by Don Juan Onate, an early governor, who recorded his discovery of the Gulf of California on April 16, 1605. Another message, dated 1692, describes how Diego de Vargas brought Spanish rule back to the area after an Indian uprising. In 1849 words in English began to appear at El Morro. Some are intricately carved; others are just signatures, such as those of two men who traveled with Lt. Edward Beale and his camel expedition westward in 1857. A footpath leads from Inscription Rock to the highest point of the mesa, where the dwellings of ancient Indians can be seen. Here too is a view of the surrounding landscape, a vast, empty, much-traveled desert.

Kit Carson went west at the age of sixteen and never regretted going. Journeying along the Santa Fe Trail, he came to Taos with a wagon train in 1826. In time becoming a celebrated marksman, trapper, and guide, he led others through the mountains in anticipation of beaver, Indians, and adventure. Carson went along with the explorer John C. Fremont on several expeditions and in later years led gold rush caravans westward. He also worked as an Indian agent and served as a Civil War general. Wedded two

times, first to an Arapaho woman who succumbed within months, and then to Josefa Jaramillo, Carson bought the home near Taos as a wedding present in 1843. The house, an adobe built in 1825, is typical of the Southwest, with low-to-the-ground proportions and walls three feet thick. And adjacent to the house are the final resting places of Josefa Carson and her husband, who is remembered as a person of special courage, preeminent among the pioneers of the West.

OKLAHOMA

With neither trees nor rock in abundance on the plains, many settlers, like Marshal McCully, built their first homes of the grasslands themselves. Coming to what is now Aline in 1893, McCully joined other newcomers in rushing to buy up land when the Cherokee Outlet became available. He passed his first December in a dugout, a hole hollowed out of a hillside, and the next June built a more accommodating two-room house. Using a horse-drawn plow, McCully loosened tufts of sod, a combination of soil and the matted undergrowth of buffalo grass. Separating these into long narrow strips, he put them up like bricks to form the walls, leaving openings for doors and windows. Trees served as rafters, and a thicket of shrubby vegetation over them, topped by another layer of sod, made a sturdy and airtight, albeit leaky, roof. After McCully had coated the interior with an alkali plaster, he invited home his new wife. And here the two remained for more than a decade, about twice as long as the usual sod house was supposed to last. Then they built a two-story house of wood and the soddy became a spare room.

The Creeks arrived in Indian Territory in the 1830s. This land had been given to the Five Civilized Tribes (Creeks, Cherokees, Choctaws, Chickasaws and Seminoles) that

were removed by the government from their homes in the Southeast. Several thousand Creeks, sensing the hopelessness of their situation, came of their own free will, but another twenty thousand made a forced march under military supervision. Close to forty percent died on the way. At first the Creeks continued with their system of government by a tribal council of chiefs. But after 1865 they turned to a constitution and a government resembling that of the United States. Their elected officials met yearly in a council house completed in 1878. This building included a supreme court, the mounted police, and the House of Kings and House of Warriors. In 1906 Congress banned tribal governments, and after Oklahoma statehood in 1907, the Council House became a county courthouse.

In 1869 Lt. Gen. Philip Henry Sheridan was present as the first stakes were driven marking the site of Fort Sill. Garrisoned as a cavalry post to help quiet the Indians on the southern plains, the fort was never attacked. All the same, Gen. William T. Sherman always said that he had his most hair-raising Indian encounter at Fort Sill: while on a general inspection in 1871, he barely escaped a scalping at the hands of Kiowa braves who were being held for their part in a wagon train disaster. By the time the last of the Indian Territory was opened to settlers in 1901, the cavalry's glory days were close to being over. Before long cannon arrived, and soon the fort became a training post for field artillery, which today includes missiles. Luckily, though, the army kept the buildings of the original fort. Many now include artifacts from the cavalry days, while horse-drawn conveyances are seen in the fort's old stone corral. The 1875 chapel is one of the oldest churches in Oklahoma. And so many great Indian chiefs are buried in the fort's graveyard that it has become known as the Arlington of Indian Territory. On the

grounds, a stone memorial topped by an eagle marks the burial site of Geronimo, the Apache leader who died imprisoned at Fort Sill in 1909.

TEXAS

Fort Davis was established in 1854 to escort settlers traveling west through Indian territory along the San Antonio-El Paso Road. During the first decade it saw the experimental use of camels on reconnaissance trips in the area. Confederate soldiers seized the fort in 1861; when they deserted it the next year, Apaches burned its wooden barracks, post headquarters, and officers' houses. In 1867 the fort was rebuilt, but this time with limestone and adobe brick. Over the next twenty years the post housed black regiments, called buffalo soldiers by the Apaches, who no doubt saw a similarity between their wavy hair and that of the buffalo. The black soldiers served well in protecting the settlers. But by 1891 the fort had passed its zenith and was closed.

Roy Bean was a bartender in the town of Vinegaroon when he was made the local magistrate in 1882. Brandishing an 1879 copy of the Texas statutes and a pair of revolvers, Judge Bean began dispensing justice, some argue, even before his term was legal, on the vagrants and varmints who frequented the tough little shanty town. Bean's style meant West Texas logic and expediency, with banishment, absent side arm, mount, or money, or a fine (forty, fifty dollars and a round of drinks for the jury) as the usual punishment. Bean kept most of the money, including one for forty dollars collected on a dead man for "carrying a concealed weapon." In 1883 Bean left Vinegaroon for Langtry. The town had been named for a railway man, but Bean named it for Lillie Langtry, an English actress with whom he was enamored. He also gave her stage name, the Jersey

Lilly, to his combination courtroom and saloon. The judge's business know-how reached its pinnacle in 1896 when, in contempt of court in the United States and Mexico, he set up a prize fight on a sandbar in the Rio Grande. Shrewd as ever, Bean put off the fight while enthusiasts rushed the Jersey Lilly to buy the dollar-a-bottle beer he had stored up for the occasion.

Richard King was just a youngster when he hid away on a ship in New York in 1835. For the next decade he labored as a dock worker around the Gulf of Mexico, then became a river pilot for the government on the Rio Grande during the Mexican War. After the end of hostilities he got his own boat, and soon his business dominated the river's trade. King knew little about the open range, but saw ranching as the best bet in Texas. In 1853 he acquired fifteen thousand acres on Santa Gertrudis Creek, not far from what is now Kingsville, for three hundred dollars. By the time he died in 1885, he owned more than five hundred thousand acres. King's family continued his interest in the experimental breeding of animals, in time producing the Santa Gertrudis breed of cattle, a desert-hardy combination of the shorthorn and the Brahman. They also perfected the Old Sorrel line of quarter horses for which the ranch is renowned.

The south central states celebrate the spirit that marked the westward procession of the American people. From reminders of the earliest civilizations in New Mexico to Texas' San Antonio de Valero mission, site of the Alamo, and Central City, Colorado, with its roguish, rakish past, the sites of the south central states do indeed preserve an ever-interesting past.

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